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Olfactory Visuals

A Case of Saffron Prohibition in *Ḥadīṭ* Commentary

Atanas SHINIKOV

Abstract: A review of the *Ṣiḥāḥ* corpus of prophetic traditions reveals multiple accounts on the application of perfume. Here the social role perfume and cosmetics could assume in Muslim worldview is examined through a closer look at the specific case of the prophetic saffron prohibition for men, expounded upon in the authoritative *Faṭḥ al-Bārī bi-Ṣarḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḥārī* commentary of Ibn Ḥaḡar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 1449). Prohibition of saffron usage by men is put in the light of a historically established interpretative and linguistic tradition supported by drawing on a solid body of previous sources, mainly within the Ṣāfi‘īte *maḏhab*. In case we need to build a hierarchy of sensory perceptions in order to decode the cultural role of saffron, it is difficult to say whether the olfactory or the visual element prevails. Yet, both saffron smell and colour can be perceived as pointing to a meaning beyond themselves. A saffron ban imposed in such a manner is made reasonable only within the discourses of legally charged *ḥadīṭ* interpretation; it is here where aspects of smell and sight play a signficatory role with regards to cultural practices and occupy a transcendently substantiated position.

Keywords: Perfume, saffron, Ibn Ḥaḡar al-‘Asqalānī, *Faṭḥ al-Bārī*, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḥārī*.

Résumé : Un examen du corpus de traditions prophétiques *ṣiḥāḥ* révèle de nombreux récits mentionnant l’application de parfums. Le rôle social que les parfums et les cosmétiques peuvent endosser dans une vision musulmane du monde peut être examiné à travers le cas spécifique de la prohibition prophétique du safran pour les hommes, exposé en détails dans le commentaire d’Ibn Ḥaḡar al-‘Asqalānī (m. 1449), le *Faṭḥ al-Bārī bi-Ṣarḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḥārī*, qui fait autorité. L’interdiction de l’utilisation du safran par les hommes sera abordée à la lumière d’une tradition linguistique et interprétative historiquement bien établie et s’appuyant sur un ensemble solide de sources plus anciennes, principalement celles du *maḏhab* ṣāfi‘īte. S’il fallait construire une hiérarchie des perceptions sensorielles afin de décoder le rôle culturel du safran, il serait difficile de dire si l’élément olfactif ou visuel prévaut. En effet, tant l’odeur du safran que sa couleur peuvent être perçues comme ayant une signification au-delà d’elles-mêmes. Le bannissement du safran ainsi imposé prend seulement sens dans le cadre des discours sur

l'interprétation légale des *ḥadīṭ*-s. Les aspects d'odeur et de vue jouent ici un rôle significatif en matière de pratiques culturelles et occupent une position justifiée de manière transcendente.

Mots-clés : Parfum, safran, Ibn Ḥaḡar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī*, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḥārī*.

الملخص : إنّ النظر في الصحاح من الحديث يكشف عن كثير من النصوص تتضمن على استخدام الطيب. الدور الاجتماعي الذي تلعبه الطيب والموادّ التجميلية، والمكانة التي تحتلّها في نظرة المسلمين يتمّ البحث فيهما من خلال تحليل قضية النهي عن التزعفر للرجال في شرح فتح الباري لابن حجر العسقلاني. النهي عن التزعفر للرجال يقع في ضوء التقليد الفقهي واللغوي الذي يتمّ الدعم عنه من خلال الاستناد على كثرة متواصلة تاريخياً من الموارد الفقهية السابقة ومعظمها داخل المذهب الشافعي. إنّ من الصعب أن نفرّق بين حاسّتي الشمّ والبصر ونحدّد أيّ منهما تغلب على الأخرى في حالة إقامة ترتيب الحواسّ. في نفس الوقت يجب الذكر على أنّ كلا حاسّتي الشمّ والبصر تشيران إلى معنى رمزي ما وراء ذاتهما. وهكذا يظهر فرض النهي عن التزعفر للرجال متحمّلاً بالمعنى داخل الفقه ليس إلا، وهناك تلعب حاسّتا الشمّ والبصر دوراً رمزياً من وجهة النظر للممارسات الثقافية وتحتلّ موقعا متعالياً يثبته الدين.

الكلمات المحوريّة : الطيب، الزعفران، ابن حجر العسقلاني، فتح الباري، صحيح البخاري.

“In the world”, goes on the ḥadīṭ of the prophet Muhammad (d. 632), “perfume and women have been made dear to me (*ḥubbiba ilayya*)”.¹ Regardless of the scholarly debate on the historicity controversies around the origins and development of the ḥadīṭ compilations,² it deserves mentioning that at least since the time of the emblematic “Treatise” (*Risāla*) of Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Šāfi‘ī (d. 820),³ the prophetic traditions have emerged as exerting normative influence on the ethos of Muslim daily life. Illustrative as it may be, the saying above is not alone within the source material to elucidate aspects of perfume application in Muslim perceptions. A review of the textual corpus of the “authentic” prophetic traditions (*ṣiḥāḥ*) reveals numerous accounts on the application of perfume and perfume related substances. Although one would expect to see the common *‘itr* term to designate “perfume”, we rather find that the Arabic *ṭīb* has been favoured over it. References to perfumes are found through specific terms as well, such as musk (*misk*), amber (*‘anbar*), camphor (*kāfūr*), saffron (*za‘farān*), safflower (*‘uṣfur*), the saffron based *ḥalūq*, or the elliptical “yellowness” (*ṣufra*), within several textual sections. Multiple mentions can be discovered in the ḥadīṭ books of ritual pilgrimage (*ḥaǧǧ*), manners (*adab*), gifts (*hiba*), dress (*libās*), “adornment” (*zīna*), ritual bathing (*ǧuṣl*), funerals (*ǧanā‘iz*), mosques and congregations (*al-masāǧid wa-l-ǧamā‘āt*), kind treatment of women (*‘iṣrat al-nisā*), and “combing [the hair]” (*taraǧǧul*). Yet, what place could we see perfume and related cosmetic substances occupy in those accounts? What would the possible normative meanings of perfume usage be from ḥadīṭ point of view, as perceived in later Sunni discourses? How attempts to reconstruct those implications could be embarked upon, and what would these eventually reveal?

Suggesting a direct linkage between the thematic titles of the ḥadīṭ portions in which mentions of perfume are found, and the purpose of perfume usage, seems to carry the perils of the *petitio principii* methodological risk. Besides, relation between normative religious texts and cultural practice would stand out of the scope of the present paper; same might be said on the historical examinations of evidenced cases of Muslim practices with regards to perfume. On the positive side, however, there seems to be prescriptive material to support exploration of the dimensions of a framework of perception that regulates a Muslim bodily ethos of perfume within certain periods, based on commentaries of the ḥadīṭ texts. Aspects of such a proposition would be tested here through a consideration of saffron (*za‘farān*, *Crocus sativus*) in texts reflecting on its place in prophetic traditions. Saffron is a favoured substance across the “authentic” ḥadīṭ; the ones of al-Buḥārī (d. 870) record around twelve occurrences of saffron or related lexical derivatives, most of them articulating a prohibition of its usage in specific contexts. This should not be confused with an overall ban on it historically: besides pointed as a popular compound within Muslim

1. Al-Nasā‘ī, *Sunan*, vol. 7, p. 72 and 74.

2. MOTZKI 2004, MOTZKI 2010, JUYNBOLL 1983, JUYNBOLL 1996, JUYNBOLL 2007, HALLAQ 1999.

3. AL-SHĀFI‘Ī 1961.

culinary practice,⁴ saffron, together with musk, ambergris, aloes wood, and camphor is considered as one of the five principal “simple aromatic substances” (*uṣūl ḥamsa*) at least since the work of Yūḥannā b. Māsawayh (d. 857) on perfumes.⁵

Interpretations on perfume related portions of the prophetic sayings can be discovered in the major Sunnī *ṣurūḥ* works, among which the ones of al-Nawawī's (d. 1277) commentary on the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim (d. 875), Abū al-Ṭayyib Abādī (d. 1329) in his *ʿAwn al-maʿbūd fī ṣarḥ Sunan Abī Dāwūd* expounding on the traditions collection of Abū Dāwūd (d. 888), Ḡalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī's (d. 1505) commentary of al-Nasā'ī's (d. 915) *Sunan*, or Ibn Ḥaḡar al-ʿAsqalānī's (d. 1449) *Faṭḥ al-bārī* on al-Buḡārī's (d. 870) compendium of traditions, are just few to mention to stand out as authoritative. Being among the primary normative texts of Sunnī Islam, the corpus of prophetic traditions has supported regulations on the usage of cosmetic products as well, as seen in such works as Ibn al-Ḡawzī (d. 1200)'s “Regulations on Women” (*Aḥkām al-nisāʾ*) which constitutes a compilation of *ḥadīṭ*-s to address life of women from *fiqh* perspective.⁶ At the same time, the topic of Muslim normative aspects of perfume and cosmetics usage seems more under-researched than not within scholarly pieces to resort to a variety of approaches,⁷ with few notable exceptions.⁸

Odours appear related to social frameworks and cultural practices, whereas they turn into symbolically charged devices to convey meanings beyond the purely utilitarian usage. Works such as the one of Constance Classen, David Howes and Antony Synnott, show that it is possible to attempt construction of high level cultural histories across prolonged time spans and extended geographical areas through the prism of the various social spaces and practices that smells contribute to (CLASSEN, HOWES and SYNNOTT 1994). Exploration of perception of smells and what Alain Corbin labels as “[to] study the logic of systems of images” from which the history of smells is generated,⁹ are likely to yield unexpectedly intriguing results. Stepping upon such a broader understanding, the social roles saffron

4. With *kabāb* appearing as an example (ELAHI 2009), but also refer to the chicken meat based sweet-sour dish of Persian origin *zīrbāḡ*, or the *ṭabāḥiḡa* the preparation of which includes combining saffron with honey nuts, corn starch, etc. (WAINES 2002, p. 381).

5. Ibn Māsawayh, *Ḡawāhir al-ṭīb al-mufrada*, fol. 13v.

6. Full reference data of the mentioned works can be found in the bibliography.

7. E.g. *El²*, which does not cover an overview of perfumes within Muslim norms and practice; the *ʿItr* entry does not contain information in itself but refers to the entries dedicated to individual types of perfume and cosmetic substances. Then, in the specific ones on ambergris (PLESSNER and RUSKA 1986), musk (DIETRICH 1993), camphor (DIETRICH 1997), saffron (WAINES et SANAGUSTIN 2002) scholarly effort has been invested in areas such as domestic usages, application of the substances in medicine, ways of production, varieties and geographical spread, ref. as well Aubaile-Sallenave (1987) and Mottahedin (1985).

8. E.g. Aʿlam (1990) which covers religious aspects of usage of camphor in funerals in Islamic times, or Juynboll (1986), dealing with dyeing the hair and beard in early Islam with substances such as *ḥinnāʾ* (*Lawsonia inermis*), to mention briefly the saffron related *ṣufra* as a perfume, rather than a dye, to have probably been used by the Prophet based on a commentary of Muḥammad al-Zurqānī on the *Muwatṭaʾ* of Mālik (JUYNBOLL 1986, p. 57) or drawing on Ibn Ḥaḡar al-ʿAsqalānī himself.

9. CORBIN 1986, p. 5.

(*zaʿfarān*) might assume within interpretations of the authoritative Sunni *ḥadīṭ* corpus would be looked at, avoiding the risks of “imbuing” cultural practices from the Muslim past with meanings derived from externally imposed interpretative frameworks. Thus it needs to be remarked that when our material of study is represented by religious texts, containing certain postulates, “having no material reference they are neither verifiable nor falsifiable, and yet they are regarded unquestionable”.¹⁰ With their authoritativeness guaranteed, such texts cannot be said to provide direct evidence of observable or documented cultural practice as well. This makes the adoption of anthropological approaches such as Clifford Geertz’s concept of “thick description” (GEERTZ 1973), more a topic of a separate study than a direct methodological tool to leverage upon; and yet, his call to go beyond the immediacy of mere registration of “facts” to analyse the “(...) stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures”¹¹ behind them, remains a valid one.

A framework that mandates an in-depth inquiry into texts to regulate potential cultural practices and motivate behaviours would be complemented by the techniques of the “sensory anthropology” developed by David Howes and Constance Classen, which relate more tightly to the topic of the present essay. With regards to research based on textual sources, as the current one appears, they offer a method that breaks written evidence down through a cycle of extracting the references to senses, their division into sets, subsequent analysis and conclusion or statement on the “hierarchy or order of senses” for a certain culture. The technique relies on a developed “paradigm for sensing” which provides a practical toolset for analysis of sensory phenomena through outlining key areas – among which language, aesthetics and body decoration seem particularly relevant here – and defining questions to address them through (HOWES and CLASSEN 2010), thus facilitating the elucidation on the role of sensory experience. And finally, a scholarly endeavour into any normative texts body would necessarily lean upon the techniques of the critical textual inquiry and language analysis of the sources. While existence of any enduring Islamic “essence” found within Islamic normative texts and practices seems to render its propagators vulnerable to criticism at least since Edward Said on,¹² exploration of the normative religious sources, their commentaries and textual linkages to outline internal receptions and continuity within interpretations of key Islamic concepts is difficult to neglect.

The social role perfume and cosmetics related substances could assume from normative perspective would be examined through a closer look at the specific case of the prophetic saffron prohibition for men, expounded upon in the 15th century *Faṭḥ al-bārī*

10. RAPPAPORT 1979, p. 208-209.

11. GEERTZ 1973, p. 7.

12. SAID 1978, then a brief summary on the Saidian controversy (IRWIN 2007) as well as criticism in Kramer (2001, p. 27-43), and more recently in Varisco (2007).

commentary, considering certain limitations posed by the choice of the source text.¹³ Known for having an “enduring fame” for his works on the science of *ḥadīṭ*, and “most admired for his work on al-Buḥārī”,¹⁴ Ibn Ḥaḡar offers a good illustration of the aspects of a diligently outlined late Sunni perception of saffron in his *ṣarḥ*. The shortest version of the saffron prohibition tradition is found in the “Book of Dress” (*Kitāb al-libās*) of al-Buḥārī’s collection of traditions.¹⁵ The *ḥadīṭ* is reported as transmitted through Anas and seems to voice a plain message along the lines that “The Prophet, peace be upon him, has forbidden (*nahiya*) [the application of] saffron for a man (*an yataza‘far al-raḡul*)”. The contents of the message appear direct, yet a closer look at it offers a good case to jump beyond the “thin description” of a mere observation of a prohibition norm in Ryle’s terms.¹⁶ In the textual surrounding of the *ḥadīṭ*, we find the preceding tradition dealing with the invocations regarding those who put on a new dress (*ma yud‘ā li-man labisa ṭawban ḡadīdan*), while the following one provides more context to the saffron prohibition by narrowing it down through the prophetic imperative on a person in state of *iḥrām* (*muḥrim*) not to wear any clothes dyed with saffron or the yellow coloured substance of *wars*.

This very context, however, raises new questions, rather than providing answers. In the first place, we face the challenge to establish the connections between the invocations on people wearing new dresses as related to the saffron prohibition on men. Then, moving down through the sequential traditions, we stumble upon a further complication. As if here the target of the prohibition are all persons, not only men, as the generic “[any] person in state of *iḥrām*” (*muḥrim*) might easily suggest; and then prohibition here seems not to be universally applicable but rather associated with the ritual state of *iḥrām* related exclusively to the ritual pilgrimage (*ḥaḡḡ*). Both the gender scope and the general nature of a saffron prohibition are challenged here. Besides, the very language of the “saffron prohibition” *ḥadīṭ* renders it prone to multiple interpretations, as long as it uses the reflexive form of the quadrilateral verb derived from the four-consonant root *z.‘f.r* which plainly indicates “application of saffron on one’s self”, expressed as well through the *nomina verbi* in the title of the “chapter” (*bāb*): “On the prohibition of application of saffron for men” (*al-nahyi ‘an al-taza‘fur li-l-riḡāl*). The attempt to leverage on the tooling provided by the approach of sensory anthropology reveals another possible stumbling block. The identification of the senses – e.g. sight [through the yellow colour of the *Crocus sativus* dye] or smell [through its

13. E.g. due to the limited scope of the paper, it shall not be construed as providing a comprehensive historical overview on the development of saffron prohibition for men, targeting a limited time frame; it cannot be expected to explore the debates around the authenticity of the prophetic traditions, and question their validity in shaping a Muslim normative understanding; it does not aim to provide an exhaustive overview of all the texts related to saffron or saffron prohibition in the *ḥadīṭ*; it does not seek to look at the linkages between prescriptive texts and practice within the *fiqh* tradition, neither to reconstruct the practice at the time of the Prophet in the spirit of Leopold von Ranke’s “as it really was” (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*) (VON RANKE 1885, VII).

14. ROSENTHAL 1986, p. 778.

15. Al-Buḥārī, *Al-Ḡāmi‘ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 4, p. 65.

16. GEERTZ 1973, p. 7.

odour] – that saffron appeals to here, looms as arduous, as long as the language itself does not clarify the exact sensory aspect of the forbidden application of saffron.

The Šāfiʿīte jurist Ibn Ḥaḡar emerges as being well aware of the interpretative intricacies the saffron prohibition *ḥadīṭ* might raise. His elaboration on its possible meanings starts with a clarification on the scope of application of the prohibited substance: the saying in the “prohibition of application of saffron for men” targets “the body” (*al-ḡasad*). That assertion is derived by placing the saying of Muḥammad within the larger context of al-Buḥārī’s book, leaning on the following “chapter on the dress upon which saffron has been applied” (*bāb al-ṭawb al-muzaʿfar*).¹⁷ By doing this, Ibn Ḥaḡar perceives the two *ḥadīṭ*-s as being hierarchically positioned, with the “saffroned dress” one to narrow the preceding tradition. Yet, if the scope – affirmed by linking and stretching interpretatively the term of “dress” (*ṭawb*) to overlap with the one of “body” (*ḡasad*) – seems to be clarified to a certain extent, it is more challenging to say the same with regards to the *muḥrim* whose wearing of saffron dyed dress in fact appears as a theme of the second *ḥadīṭ*. According to the theologian, the prohibition covered abundantly in the “Book of ritual pilgrimage” (*Kitāb al-ḥaḡḡ*), is not universally agreed upon. Drawing on Ibn Baṭṭāl’s (d. 1057) commentary, it is pointed out that Mālik and many others (*Mālik wa-ḡamāʿa*), would consider a dress dyed with saffron permitted (*ḥalāl*) by asserting that “the prohibition has been imposed specifically for the *muḥrim*” (*waqaʿa al-nahyi ʿan-hu li-l-muḥrim ḥāṣṣatan*). According to the eponym of the Šāfiʿīte school of jurisprudence, however, al-Šāfiʿī (d. 820), and the Kufians, the prohibition has been carried over the *muḥrim* and non-*muḥrim* alike.¹⁸

Going back again to the tradition prohibiting saffron upon men, after discoursing on the linkage between the “body” and the “dress”, Ibn Ḥaḡar proceeds to clarify that the restriction is valid upon men only, so that women are excluded. This constraint, however, as if to confirm the ambiguity around saffron, cannot be said to appear in all versions of this prophetic tradition, according to a short discourse on the divergences. One of the transmitters following Anas, namely ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, is said to be [ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz] Ibn Suhaib, while the transmission chain of two variants are discussed. The saying “[the application of] saffron for a man (*an yatazaʿfar al-raḡul*)”, virtually meaning “men applying saffron on themselves”, has been transmitted in this way by ʿAbd al-Wārith – who is Ibn Saʿīd – and who has been narrowing (*muqayyid*) the meaning; his way of transmission is said to be in concord with the one of Ismāʿīl b. ʿUlayya and Ḥammād b. Zayd found by Muslim[’s compendium] and others among the authors of prophetic traditions compilations (*aṣḥāb al-sunan*). And yet, affirming that Ḥammād b. Zayd’s version of the *ḥadīṭ* says that “[he] has prohibited the application of saffron for men” (*nahiya ʿan al-tazaʿfur li-l-riḡal*), al-ʿAsqalānī also states that Šuʿba has narrated from Ibn ʿUlayya in al-Nasāʾī[s collection] simplifying (*mutlaq*) it to the form of “[he] has forbidden the application of saffron on one’s self” (*nahiya ʿan al-tazaʿfur*), as if shortening it (*kaʿanna-hu ḥtaṣara-hu*). Besides that, more than ten of the

17. Al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fath*, vol. 10, p. 304.

18. Al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fath*, vol. 10, p. 305.

memorizers (*ḥuffāz*) have narrated it from Ismāʿīl through the restriction for men, while the possibility that the stripped, shortened (*muṭlaq*) version has been made such in the process of transmission between Ismāʿīl and Šuʿba, is admitted.

As seen in the paragraph above, the more specific version of the *ḥadīṭ* that forbids saffron for men enjoys the support of a prevalent Muslim majority of traditional narrators according to Ibn Ḥaǧar. Knowing that the prohibition targets representatives of the male gender, the *šarḥ* presents the reasoning on the cause for proscription of the crocus product, which in this case offers little more than posing a new dilemma. There has been a divergence of opinions, tells us the Šāfiʿite scholar, on the principles underlying the ban. The first possible reason for prohibition of application of saffron on one's self would be for "its smell because of it being the perfume of women, and because of which a prohibition of the *ḥalūq* has also occurred" ([...] *li-rā'ihati-hi li-kawni-hi ṭīb al-nisā' wa-li-hādā ḡā'a al-zaǧar 'an al-ḥalūq*). The second possible explanation advanced here is the one of colour: because of its colour as related to "all kinds of yellow [types of perfumes]" (*kull al-ṣufra*).¹⁹

It needs to be noted that al-ʿAsqalānī leverages on the already well known and defined nature of saffron as related to two sensory perceptions of seeing and smell. As early as al-Ḥalīl b. Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī (d. 786) in his *Kitāb al-ʿayn* we observe a definition of saffron as "a dye which is a type of a perfume [emphasis mine, A.Sh.]" (*ṣibǧ wa-huwwa min al-ṭīb*).²⁰ Its relation to colour has also been emphasized upon there by reference to al-Asad [al-Duʿalī? (d. 688)], according to whom "it has been named as saffroned because of it being rose in colour close to yellowness" (*yusammā muzaʿfaran li-anna-hu ward al-lawn yaḍribu ilā al-ṣufra*).²¹ In the same line of thought, the much later and now turned classical dictionary of "Language of the Arabs" (*Lisān al-ʿarab*) authored by Muḥammad b. Mukarram b. Manẓūr (d. 1312), provides a definition of saffron as "this well-known dye, which is also [a type of] a perfume" (*hādā al-ṣibǧ al-maʿrūf wa-huwwa min al-ṭīb*), and indicatively mentions in the saffron entry the very prohibition *ḥadīṭ* commented upon by Ibn Ḥaǧar, with the expression "I saffroned the dress" (*zaʿfartu al-tawb*) listed as synonymous as the one of "I dyed it" (*ṣabaǧtu-hu*).²²

Then, goes on the theologian, it needs mentioning that another Sunnī authority, al-Bayhaqī (d. 1066), belonging to Šāfiʿite school of *fiqh* just as al-ʿAsqalānī himself, draws upon a saying of the patron of their school – al-Šāfiʿ – according to whom it is not considered lawfully permitted (*ḥalāl*) to apply saffron on one's self.²³ In case this happens, one is supposed to wash it off. He [al-Šāfiʿ?] is also narrated to have said that "I have permitted (*urahḥiṣ*) [things dyed with] safflower" (*uṣfur*, *Carthamus tinctorius*) because there

19. Al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fath*, vol. 10, p. 304.

20. Al-Farāhīdī, *Kitāb al-ʿayn*, vol. 2, p. 182.

21. Al-Farāhīdī, *Kitāb al-ʿayn*, vol. 2, p. 333.

22. Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿarab*, vol. 4, p. 324.

23. Al-Bayhaqī here does not appear in al-ʿAsqalānī's narrative for no reason: he himself compiled several traditions on the topic in his *Sunan* mentioned here as well (al-Bayhaqī, *Al-Sunan al-kubrā*, vol. 5, p. 55-56).

has not been someone found to talk on it except an ambiguous saying of ‘Alī [b. Abī Ṭālib].²⁴ And yet, al-Bayhaqī is pointed to have said that this has not been identified as a saying of ‘Alī, and proceeds on to cite a tradition narrated by ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar according to which the Prophet was reported to have seen two dresses coloured with safflower (*tawbān mu‘aṣfarān*) and stated that “these are among the dresses of the infidels, so do not put them on”. This saying of Muḥammad is mentioned as being one collected by Muslim; according to one of his formulations, the *ḥadīṭ* goes even further, as to record a dialogue: “[and] I said: Shall I wash them? He said: No! But burn them out!” (*lā bal aḥriq-humā*). And then al-Bayhaqī plainly asserts that had this reached al-Šāfi‘ī, he would have said to act in compliance with the Sunna, as his habit used to be (*la-qāla bi-hi ttibā‘an li-l-Sunna ka-‘ādati-hi*).²⁵

The account on diversity of interpretations goes on through al-‘Asqalānī’s generalization that “a group of the righteous predecessors has considered what has safflower applied on it as offensive, while another group has permitted it” (*wa-qad kariha al-mu‘aṣfar ḡamā‘a min al-salaf wa-raḥḡaṣa fi-hi ḡamā‘a*); and belonging to those that stand for it being offensive “amongst our companions” (*min aṣḡābi-nā*) is al-Ḥalīmī [likely to be the Šāfi‘īte al-Ḥalīmī, d. 1012?]. Another authoritative discourse in the Šāfi‘īte legal tradition used to substantiate the comment, is Abū Zakariyā Muḡyī al-Dīn Yaḡyā b. Šaraf al-Nawawī (d. 1277)’s statement provided in his *šarḡ* of Muslims’ *ḥadīṭ* compendium in favour of the aforementioned through the telling “Al-Bayhaqī has masterfully handled the issue; and Allāh knows best” (*atqana al-Bayhaqī al-mas‘ala wa-Lāhu a‘lam*).²⁶ At the same time, a key legal figure such as Mālik (d. 795) has been reported to allow things which have had safflower and saffron applied on them (*al-mu‘aṣfar wa-l-muza‘far*) restricting them to the space of the Muslim homes (*buyūt*), but not in public gatherings (*maḡāfil*).²⁷

The narrative is elaborated by positioning the saffron prohibition within specific social contexts, the first one being that of marital relationship (*nikāḡ*) and its intimate dimensions. According to a tradition, the companion ‘Abd al-Raḡmān b. ‘Awf married, and subsequently visited the Prophet, still traces of “yellow” [perfume] (*ṣufra*) found on him. The tradition skips an underlying questioning to have taken place, and yet ‘Abd al-Raḡmān b. ‘Awf advanced an explanation to justify the *ṣufra*: “the *ḡalūq* perfume has been found on his dress, as it has adhered to him from the woman”, not being found on his body. And here, in a more precise expression that the one in the beginning of the commentary that equals between a “body” and a “dress”, we find the clarification that one that applies saffron on his body (*badan*) is found to be more offensive than the one doing that on

24. Al-‘Asqalānī, *Fath*, vol. 10, p. 304.

25. Al-‘Asqalānī, *Fath*, vol. 10, p. 304.

26. In fact, al-‘Asqalānī cites here verbatim the reference to al-Bayhaqī within a portion of the much longer *šarḡ* of al-Nawawī where we see that “al-Bayhaqī, may Allāh be pleased with him, has masterfully handled the issue, and he has said in his book on the knowledge of the traditions (*Sunan*) that al-Šāfi‘ī has prohibited man what has had saffron applied on it (*muza‘far*) and has permitted (*abāḡa*) what has had safflower applied on it (*mu‘aṣfar*)” etc. (al-Nawawī, *Šaḡīḡ Muslim bi-šarḡ al-Nawawī*, vol. 14., p. 54).

27. Al-Nawawī, *Šaḡīḡ Muslim bi-šarḡ al-Nawawī*, vol. 14, p. 54.

his dress (*tawb*). In the same spirit and letter of the prohibition, the commentator lists incontestable *ḥadīṭ* authorities such as Abū Dāwud, al-Tirmīdī and al-Nasā'ī, according to whom a man that entered in Muḥammad's presence bearing traces of "yellowness" (*ṣufra*), deserved the Prophet "finding that offensive" (*fa-kariha dālika*), and subsequently ordering abandonment of *ṣufra*. Situation has been additionally aggravated by the reference to a tradition to inform that "the angels are not present at the funeral of an infidel, as well as the one who has embalmed himself with saffron" (*lā taḥḍur al-malā'ika ḡanāzat kāfir wa-lā muḍammihh bi-za'farān*). And finally, a companion who happened to have had saffron applied on him by his family because of his chapped hands, is reported to have been instructed by the Messenger of Allāh, without being greeted upon (*fa-lam yuraḥhib bī*), to "go away and wash this off you" (*iḍḥab wa-ḡsil 'an-ka hādā*).²⁸

The exposition in close keeping to the vivid text of the *Faṭḥ al-bārī* reveals a certain density of text to facilitate unfolding the thematic threads in which the proscription operated according to Muslim interpretative authorities. In the first place, it needs to be noted that the commentary to this most concise version of saffron condemnation here does not present a comprehensive view of the whole textual and cultural context. Other repeatable mentions of the saffron in the *ḥadīṭ* collections, such as the ones around the dress of the *muḥrim*,²⁹ usage of saffron as a dye of beard by the Prophet,³⁰ through celebration of child birth within the 'aqīqa ceremony,³¹ or the *ḡihād* context of saffron allusions³² are omitted. The emphasis seems to fall here on more general aspects of the injunction and the rest of the source material would be supposedly covered in the remaining part of the *Faṭḥ* which unfolds *ḥadīṭ* by *ḥadīṭ*. In the same time a number of those themes seem inherently present in this late discourse of the Sunnī mainstream through the historically continuous interpretation of al-'Asqalānī. Those indicative gleanings can be revealed through the terminological circles that surround the ban. In the first place, indisputably the main term used to designate saffron here is the *za'farān* (*Crocus sativus*); following a "sensory anthropology" starting point, it becomes clear that it is perceived both as a "perfume" (*ṭīb*) and a "dye" (*ṣibḡ*). Perfume-wise, the prohibition can be understood along the gender dividing lines of the "perfume of women" (*ṭīb al-nisā'*) expression used in the commentary evoking the olfactory side of it. Usage of smell as a powerful dividing line between genders is not uncommon to the *ḥadīṭ* corpus; moreover, we have evidence that the traditions

28. Al-'Asqalānī, *Faṭḥ*, vol. 10, p. 304, see also al-Bayhaqī, *Al-Sunan al-kubrā*, p. 55-56 for traditions with similar contents.

29. Ref. e.g. illustrations of saffron prohibition for *muḥrim*-s found in al-Buḥārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ* in the "Book of Knowledge" or "Book of Prayer" (al-Buḥārī, *Al-Ḡāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 1, p. 64 and p. 138), or in Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ* and his "Book of pilgrimage" (Ibn Ḥaḡḡaḡ, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, p. 459).

30. Ref. e.g. *Sunan* of al-Nasā'ī, mentioning that the Prophet used *ḥalūq* as a dyeing agent for his beard (al-Suyūṭī, *Sunan al-Nasā'ī bi-ṣarḥ al-ḥāfiẓ Ḡalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī*, vol. 8, p. 517), as well as JUYNBOLL (1986).

31. Al-Siḡistānī, *Sunan Abī Dāwud*, vol. 4, p. 464.

32. Al-Tirmīdī's collections of traditions and his "Book of *ḡihād*" there, where [the blood of?] those who have been wounded fighting in the path of Allāh, is promised in the Resurrection Day "to have colour like saffron and odour like the musk" (*lawnu-hā al-za'farān wa-rīḥu-hā al-misk*), ref.: al-Tirmīdī, *Al-Ḡāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 4, p. 185.

tend to put a special emphasis on it. As the famous saying of the Prophet goes, there are regulations that cover aspects of perfumes of men, as opposed to the ones for women, along the lines that “Fragrance for men is that which its scent is apparent and its colour is hidden, and fragrance for women is that which its colour is visible and its scent is hidden.”³³ No need to go deeper here into the historical reception of the ḥadīṭ to observe the divinely sanctioned division through utilization of the markers of colour and smell.

It is to this gender loaded aspect of smell that we relate the specific ḥalūq term as well. Based on saffron, this type perfume has been appearing as explicitly forbidden for men long before Ibn Ḥaḡar wrote his commentary. Approximately one century and a half before him, Ibn Manẓūr sheds light in his *Lisān al-‘arab* by defining ḥalūq as “a type of a perfume, it has been called [as well] saffron” (*ḍarb min al-ṭīb wa-qīla al-za‘farān*). The summary he provides wraps up the dilemma. He clarifies that this consonant root has also produced the derivatives of *taḥallaqa* (“apply ḥalūq on one’s self”) and *ḥallaqtu-hu* (“I have applied ḥalūq on it”), hence the expression “I smeared ḥalūq on it” (*ṭalaytu-hu bi-l-ḥalūq*), and “the woman applied ḥalūq on her body” (*ḥallaqat al-mar’a ḡisma-hā*) meaning “smeared it with ḥalūq” (*ṭalat-hu bi-l-ḥalūq*), and the reflexive “the woman has applied on herself the ḥalūq” (*taḥallaqat al-mar’a bi-l-ḥalūq*). In the style of Ibn Manẓūr’s lexicographic work, the summary is only introduced by the derivatives of the *ḥ.l.q* root. It is brought to our knowledge that the ḥalūq is “the known perfume”, produced from saffron and other different perfume compounds, characterized by the dominant colours of red (*ḥumra*) and yellow (*ṣufra*). It has been observed, he tells us, that sometimes it is classified within the domain of the Ṣarī’a permissibility (*ibāḥa*), while it other occasion it belongs to the field of forbiddance (*naḥyi ‘an-hu*). And forbiddance is considered more wide spread and better affirmed; saffron has been prohibited “being the perfume of women, as they are the ones to use it most”. The authority of Ibn al-Aṭīr [Maḡd al-Dīn Abū al-Sa‘ādāt al-Mubārak, d. 1210?] is drawn upon, to have said that “it is evident that the traditions on forbiddance are abrogating (*nāsiḥa*) [the rest].”³⁴

This elaboration ties into the second sensory aspect of the saffron prohibition for the male gender, namely its colour. The terms found in relation to it are the general “yellowness” (*ṣufra*) – often but not exclusively associated with the fair sex – and the more specific *Carthamus tinctorius*, the safflower (*‘uṣfur*), and the term of “thing that has safflower applied on it” (*mu‘aṣfar*) appearing with Ibn Ḥaḡar. The aspect of colour is emphasized again by Ibn Manẓūr as a linguistic authority: safflower is “thing used to dye with” (*ḥāḍā-l-lāḍī yuṣbaḡ bi-hi*), which brings in additional clarity towards its known application, namely dyeing of clothes, in the expression “I have coloured the clothes with ‘uṣfur, so it was coloured with it” (*‘aṣfartu al-ṭawb fa-ta‘aṣfar*).³⁵ The notion of safflower as associated primarily with the perception of seeing, and only secondary with the quality of smell is not

33. Al-Tirmīḏī, *Al-Ġāmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 5, p. 107.

34. Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘arab*, vol. 10, p. 91.

35. Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘arab*, vol. 4, p. 581.

something unique to Ibn Manẓūr. Illustrations of this can be discovered as a historically sustainable common theme within the Šāfiʿite legal thought within exemplary authors such as Abū al-Ḥasan al-Māwardī (d. 1058). In the voluminous work on Šāfiʿite jurisprudence he wrote as an explanation of the *Muḥtaṣar* (“Abridgement”) of al-Šāfiʿī’s disciple Ismāʿīl b. Yaḥyā al-Muzanī (d. 877), we are told that “Al-Šāfiʿī, may Allah be pleased with him, has said that safflower is not among the perfumes” (*qāla al-Šāfiʿī raḍiya Lāhu ‘an-hu wa-l-‘uṣfur laysa min al-ṭīb*). In a dense text found in the “Book on Ritual Pilgrimage” (*Kitāb al-ḥaǧǧ*) al-Māwardī in his own turn embarks on reasoning with regards to the nature of the ‘uṣfur and its usage as a colouring agent on the clothes of the *muḥrim*-s. The question boils down not that much to the physical qualities or ingredient composition of the ‘uṣfur that could classify it among the perfumes only, but to whether safflower could be treated from legal perspective as the perfumes (*fī ḥukm al-ṭīb*).³⁶

Hence, going back to Geertz’ language, we face a “structure of signification”, that appears important for 15th century Sunni discourse. A prohibition of saffron here is not construed as a standalone iteration of a ban to comply with; rather, the look into this single case here hints at the existence of complex regulative frameworks. They, even in the lexicographical sources, can be seen to sit within a broader domain linked to Muslim jurisprudence trying to position *Crocus sativus* along the legal axis of the categories of “permitted” (*mubāḥ*) and “reproachable” (*makrūh*). Although the language of *fiqh* shows through in the commentary of Ibn Ḥaǧar without significant interpretative effort, a *ṣarḥ*, being sometimes no more than “explanations of a term, of a verse, or of a tradition”, or “a commentary on a single tradition”,³⁷ is not a formal legal text with the status of a *fatwā* or a *fiqh* manual. While this might raise questions on the relation of such a commentary to cultural and legal practice, it does not diminish its value to facilitate a reconstruction of a 15th century Sunni *Weltanschauung* on perfumes and saffron in specific. Its task is not to question the normative status of the prophetic traditions; at the time of the commentator the debate around their contents and validity within legal production has long been considered settled down. What matters here, however, is the attempt to position this case of saffron avoidance within a tradition of continuity leaning on previous recognized legal authorities. Ibn Ḥaǧar is putting the prohibition in chronological and inter-*madḥab* perspective, drawing mostly but not exclusively on Šāfiʿite sources, interrelating to each other, such as al-Šāfiʿī, al-Ḥalīmī, al-Bayhaqī, al-Nawawī, or the Mālikite Ibn Baṭṭāl. Moreover, contexts built around the saffron prohibition are not constructed independent of, or in contradiction to the common usages of the ‘saffron’ related terminology within the great works of Arabic lexicography of al-Farāhīdī and Ibn Manẓūr that point to its bi-sensory nature.

Hence, in case we need to build a hierarchy of sensory perceptions in order to decode the cultural role of saffron, it is difficult to say whether the olfactory or the visual element

36. Al-Māwardī, *Al-Ḥāwī al-kabīr*, vol. 4, p. 111.

37. GILLIOT 1997, p. 318.

prevails; we can say for sure that a third sense – the one of taste, implicit in the culinary usages of saffron – is considered insignificant from religious point of view. In the same time, both saffron smell and colour can be perceived as having highly symbolic values to point to a meaning beyond its direct perception or mere aesthetic dimension. Saffron seems to play a role of marker in the normative regulation of a variety of cases. In the first place, as the prohibition itself suggests a gender division, saffron plays the role of a device within what Hadas Hirsch calls “gendered spheres of smell” (HIRSCH 2013). On the basis of the *ṣarḥ*, and considering the colour aspect, these spheres can be extended to cover visual perception as well. The gender distinction however, without being overemphasized in the *Fatḥ al-bārī*, cannot be looked upon as monopolizing the usages of saffron. The *zaʿfarān* serves as a denominator to help delineating divinely established borders within many other areas such as ritual pilgrimage, the closed spaces of home vs. public space, faith and infidelity, relate to one’s life in the afterworld, funerals and protection of the believers by angels. Thus a saffron ban is not necessarily made meaningful through rationally grounded argumentation; it is only within the discourses of Sunni legal expression where dimensions of smell and sight acquire a transcendently regulated function and play a symbolic role with regards to normative justification of eventual cultural practices.

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